

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 29 July 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor Brunton (Chair), Councillors Cox, Dryden, C Hobson, J Hobson, Ismail, Mawston, Purvis, Sanderson, J A Walker and Williams.

OFFICIALS: J Bennington, G Brown, P Clark, J Ord, N Sayer, P Slocombe and E Williamson.

**** PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillor N J Walker, Executive Member for Resources.

**** PRESENT AS AN OBSERVER:** Councillor Rehman.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cole and Khan.

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made at this point of the meeting.

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 17 June and 1 July 2008 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

EXECUTIVE FEEDBACK – SPEED CAMERAS – ERIMUS HOUSING GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

As part of the scrutiny process and in a report of the Executive Office Manager it was reported that the Executive had considered the Board's comments on final reports in relation to Speed Cameras and Erimus Housing Grounds Maintenance Contract.

The Executive had considered and supported both the Service and Corporate Management Team responses and had also agreed the proposed Action Plans.

NOTED

EXECUTIVE MEMBERS – ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

In a report of the Scrutiny Support Officer the Board was reminded of a number of ways overview and scrutiny could be involved in 'holding the Executive to account' at different stages of the decision-making process. Such a role had been strengthened during 2007/2008 Municipal Year when arrangements had been made for individual Members of the Executive to attend Overview and Scrutiny Board.

During 2008/2009 it was proposed that the Board continue to be updated on the work of each Member of the Executive in terms of their aims, aspirations, objectives, priorities and any emerging issues. It also provided the opportunity for the Board to identify or highlight any issues of concern.

A schedule detailing proposed attendance's was outlined in Appendix 1 of the report submitted.

ORDERED that the Overview and Scrutiny Board continue to be updated on the work of each Member of the Executive and they be invited to attend the respective meetings as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report submitted.

EXECUTIVE MEMBER - RESOURCES

The Chair welcomed Councillor N J Walker who outlined the work and scope of the portfolio of the Executive Member for Resources the key areas of which included the following: -

- a) responsibility of the Council's financial services and related budgetary processes;
- b) responsibility for the Council's land and property assets and other issues including corporate legal matters, housing benefits and audit issues.

Details were provided of the main areas of responsibilities in relation to :-

- Council's Budget Strategy;
- Asset Management – compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act a key issue in recent years;
- Procurement – sustainable procurement agenda;
- Member champion for development of the Corporate Procurement Strategy and efficiency issues relating to Gershon.

Reference was made to a number of ongoing key issues such as:-

- i) Implications of the 'credit crunch' on budget and measures to address such issues;
- ii) as in the case of other local authorities it was recognised that it would be more difficult to remain in budget overall;
- iii) value for money issues;
- iv) Gershon savings;
- v) further improvements to be made in the collection of Council tax;

The Executive Member for Resources confirmed the adoption of an open door policy and with effect from September 2008 would be introducing Member surgeries for not just ward\related issues but in order to provide any clarification for such matters as the budget strategy and DDA compliance.

Members sought clarification and further information on a number of areas which included:-

- a) in relation to the procurement process and in particular the extent to which the Council was made aware of any contracts which were subsequently outsourced the Director of Resources confirmed that there was a general clause in all contracts which required the Council to be notified of such circumstances and information could be provided to the Board if it so wished;
- b) following receipt of the Revenue Support Grant Settlement representations had been submitted to Central Government challenging the level of savings which had to be achieved over a three year period which was not considered to be sustainable and a copy of the relevant letter had been circulated to all Members;
- c) in response to a suggestion for such representations to be strengthened it was noted that there were ongoing efforts for joint approaches within Local Government Associations to pursue such a matter;
- d) details were given of the extent of the role of the Executive Member for Resources in terms of the budget consultation and confirmation given that items other than structured budget issues would be highlighted by individual Executive Members and priorities identified which would then be considered collectively.

ORDERED that the Executive Member for Resources be thanked for the information provided.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME REVIEW

In a report of the Director of Resources the Board was advised of the latest position in respect of the Capital Programme for which a fundamental review was undertaken approximately every three years.

Specific reference was made to three key changes from the existing programme in relation to the following:-

- a) Building Schools for the Future - following the receipt of the bids for the provision of IT infrastructure, building and design costs together with a review of the available funding package from Central Government a deficit in funding of £1.583 million had been identified;
- b) provision had been made to deliver identified repairs and maintenance in accordance with the Building Investment plan and additional revenue costs had been built into the medium term financial plan to meet estimated capital investment costs of £30 million over the next 10 years;
- c) a recent submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund had been made towards the redevelopment of Stewart Park which involved a provisional offer of £4,617,000 grant funding which had been made to the Council on the basis of a contribution from within the Councils capital programme of £1, 546,000.

Provisions had been made, in accordance with Council priorities to ensure targeted compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act and to ensure the Council's assets and IT Infrastructure were maintained, updated and 'fit for purpose'.

It was noted that the amount of capital resources available to the Council was determined by:

- a) the level of affordable borrowing;
- b) capital receipts;
- c) external funding available to the Council; and
- d) direct revenue contributions to capital.

Reference was made to additional funding to support the revenue impact of the capital programme which had been included in the medium term financial of £700,000 in 2008/2009, £1, 000,000 in 2009/2010 and £1, 300, 000 in 2010/2011.

Details were provided of the latest summary position of the existing approved capital programme and by service as shown in Appendix A of the report submitted. Gross expenditure of the programme over this period was reported as £294.780 million.

Service areas had considered their proposals for new capital schemes and had prioritised them into the categories of essential, invest to save, or desirable. In addition consideration had been given to alternative sources of funding. Such projects were outlined in Appendix B of the report submitted along with an assessment of timing and costs.

The Executive at its meeting held on 22 July 2008 agreed that the variations to the current capital programme as outlined should be approved and that the programme of new capital starts for the period 2008/2009 to 2012/2013 as set out in Appendix B of the report submitted be approved.

In response to a number of questions the Director of Resources clarified the position with particular regard to the complex national formula which applied to Building Schools for the Future and provision of sprinkler systems in terms of BSF in order to comply with impending more stringent health and safety legislation.

NOTED

PATIENT TRANSPORT TO AND FROM JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL – HEALTH SCRUTINY PANEL FINAL REPORT

The Chair of the Health Scrutiny Panel gave an outline of the process of investigation and presented the findings of the Panel's scrutiny investigation into patient transport to and from James Cook University Hospital.

The Board considered the following recommendations of the Panel based on the submitted evidence: -

- i) The Panel recommended that the local NHS works towards ensuring that people are more empowered to choose their method of transport to and from hospital. The Panel considers it an oddity with patients having increased choice over where they access services, that the same element of choice is not available in transport.
- ii) The Panel recommends that urgent action be taken to address transport difficulties faced by regular patients, such as renal patients accessing dialysis. The Panel finds it bizarre that this cohort can be planned for, yet it would seem they actually receive the worst service as far as patient transport is concerned. The Panel would like to know the outcome.
- iii) The Panel would like to see the local NHS taking active steps to stimulate the local third sector and encourage their involvement in the provision of patient transport services to and from hospital. The Panel would like to know the outcome of this process.
- iv) The Panel would like it noted that this is an interim report, and the Panel requests a report on the updated position in January 2009 following the service reviews of Patient Transport that are currently ongoing.
- v) The Panel recommends that there be one single contact number for patients or staff to book transport. The Panel finds it confusing and unhelpful that there are presently a number of telephone numbers that can be called to arrange the service. To have one single point of contact would be in the best interests of the patient.
- vi) The Panel recommends that the 7am-7pm service currently provided North of the Tees be implemented South of the Tees as soon as possible. The Panel would like to be kept informed as to when this happens.

The Chair of the Panel asked that the report include further information on the breakdown of costs and that the situation reported at paragraph 49 be clarified.

Members noted that since the commencement of the scrutiny investigation a number of actions and reviews had already commenced by the local NHS seeking improvements to current arrangements hence the resulting interim report of the Panel and the recommendation for an update of progress at a meeting of the Panel to be held in January 2009.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the Health Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

CALL IN - OUTCOME –UNALLOCATED RESOURCES

In a report of the Senior Scrutiny Officer reference was made to the outcome of the meeting of the Board held on 15 July 2008 in accordance with the Authority's Call-In procedure. The Board had reviewed the decision made at an Executive meeting held on 24 June 2008 relating to a package of proposals as set out in the submitted report for spending unallocated resources.

The Board had agreed that the decision made at the meeting of the Executive held on 24 June 2008 should be not referred back on the basis of the evidence presented but agreed that in future the Executive should undertake greater consultation when determining the direction of unallocated resources.

NOTED

SCRUTINY REVIEW – RECOMMENDATIONS IMPLEMENTATION

The Senior Scrutiny Officer submitted a report which outlined progress achieved in relation to the implementation of agreed Executive actions resulting from the consideration of Scrutiny reports.

In terms of the Executive actions which should have been implemented by June 2008 (Appendix A), 454 had been implemented, 16 partially completed and 2 had not been implemented.

Appendix B of the report gave an update in relation to the Health Scrutiny Action Plan.

ORDERED as follows:-

1. That the information provided be noted.
2. That further information be sought and submitted to the Board in respect of the 2 Executive actions which had not yet been implemented by the target date.

SCRUTINY PANELS – PROGRESS REPORTS

A report of the Chair of each Scrutiny Panel was submitted which outlined progress on current activities.

Specific reference was made to the following:-

- a) it was suggested that careful attention should be given to avoiding any duplication of work in respect of the emotional well-being and mental health issues being reviewed by the Health Scrutiny Panel and the extent to which such issues were being examined as part of the current topic of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel in relation to Corporate Parenting Responsibilities;
- b) the Chair of the Environment Scrutiny Panel reaffirmed a request as outlined in a letter recently circulated for early notification to be given of unavailability to attend site visits and/or meetings in view of recent difficulties which had resulted in a meeting being inquorate;
- c) the Scrutiny Support Officer and the Governance Officer were thanked for their support in relation to the North East Ambulance Service Contact Centre consultation issues examined by the Tees Valley Health Scrutiny Joint Committee.

NOTED

SCRUTINY REVIEWS - CONSIDERATION OF REQUESTS

The Scrutiny Support Officer submitted a report which outlined a request from a Non-Executive Member for an investigation to be undertaken into the Toilet provision within Middlesbrough.

Taking into account the agreed criteria the Board considered the appropriateness of undertaking a scrutiny review into the suggested topic.

ORDERED that in view of ongoing discussions including the involvement of the Older Persons Partnership an update report be submitted in six months time of the current situation.

CALL IN REQUESTS

It was confirmed that no requests had been received to call-in a decision.